



Thursday, January 13, 2011

Senate Natural Resources Committee
RE: SB 89

Chairman Barrett and members of the committee,

My name is Jim Carlson. I am director of Environmental Health at the Missoula City-County Health Department and have been a public servant at the Department for 37 years. I am speaking on behalf of the Department and the City and County of Missoula.

This bill would shorten the time allowed to review a subdivision for the adequacy of drinking water supply, wastewater disposal and storm water disposal from 60 days to thirty days. We oppose this bill not because we would be rushed or make changes in our process in review, we oppose this bill because we would not have adequate time to do the job right.

Subdivisions are a relatively permanent thing. If government does a poor job in this process, government doesn't suffer and generally neither does the developer. It is the people who buy the lots, build the homes and live on the property in the future.

When counties conduct subdivision review under the Sanitation in Subdivision act they have 50 of the sixty days for review. When we are done DEQ gets another 10 days to provide oversight review. If this bill passes counties would then have 20 days for review.

The local registered sanitarians that do this review are also responsible for septic permits, restaurant inspections, water system inspections, garbage complaints, food borne disease investigations and a myriad of other programs.

The check list for reviewing a subdivision submittal is six pages long and has 138 items on it. Some items take hours to review in a large subdivision. The submittal is sometimes several inches thick including groundwater models, non-degradation calculations, mixing zone maps, pumping calculations, well locations, information about the adequacy of drinking water quantity and quality, runoff calculations, and plethora of other information.

All of this information needs to be read carefully, checked for accuracy and feasibility, checked for compliance with the regulations and a site visit is part of our quality control process. In a site visit we sometimes find that there is surface water on the land that is not shown in the application, or that some of the proposed well locations are shown in locations where a drilling rig could not go or that there is a bedrock outcrop in one of the drainfield sites. If we do not insure that these very practical issues are addressed by the developer, then the purchaser will have to deal with those issues in the future at his expense.

Most people are familiar with developments that have water quality issues, or water quantity issues or that are known to have flooding issues during big rain or melt events. It is the goal of our department to protect future homeowners from the expense and heartache that result from poor subdivision design. Please give us the time to do our jobs. We request that you do not pass this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Carlson
Director of Environmental Health